

TENNESSEE HILL

Night Coyote

I've come to protect the chickens,
to lock the shed, brush the cow

and sing to her before bed. Our father said,

*The thing to do with trouble is look
it in the eyes,* but the stars clatter

like tin. The cow—I wish she'd bellow.

Our father said, *Never find yourself
alone with danger,* meaning men.

Blackball eyes that don't flinch or blink.

Now trained on me, somewhere between
what they want and becoming what they want.

I wish the chickens had never been born.

Like our father, wish I had been a boy.
Bright loudness turns into a howl,

a lesson in how to announce the night.

The coyote keeps its teeth. Lowers
its head into flickering shed light.

Growl is a hum is a released bow string

against my ribs. As he backs away,
I promise I will not tell my brother

what he will become, or that we were raised

to fear it. His laughter cracks
with adamant future, a warning.